

VZCZCXRO8213
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #0164/01 0341446
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 031446Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9868
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTJF HOA

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000164

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/SPG, S/CRS, AF/SE WILLIAMSON
ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KPKO](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [UNSC](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: UMMA SEEKS TO REPAIR ITS PERCEIVED IMAGE

REF: (A) 07 KHARTOUM 1873
(B) KHARTOUM 161

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Umma party members are concerned that the USG has a "distorted perception" of their party and they are eager to set this image straight. Additionally, they call for USG support for a multi-opposition party dialogue on critical issues such as Darfur and the CPA. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) On 31 January Umma party members Professor Balgees Badri, Dr. El Sheikh Mahgoub and Mr. Mohamed Abdulla Adouma called on CDA Fernandez to discuss what they perceive as a "distorted perception" of the Umma Party by the USG. Professor Badri introduced herself and her two colleagues as a three-person Umma committee that will specifically focus on "Western issues" and dialogue with Western diplomats on Umma party activities. The committee began its mission by meeting with the American Embassy.

"DISTORTED IMAGE" OF UMMA

13. (U) Professor Badri laid out what Umma party members believe are incorrect USG perceptions about Sudan and the Umma Party: (a) all Northern political parties are the same (fundamentalist Islamic), (b) when the Umma party was in power (1986-1989) it committed human rights violations, and (c) Umma has lost all of its constituencies. Badri rejected these perceptions and claimed that the Umma Party has a history of democratic rule and preaches moderate Islam. She went on to say that the Party is committed to the Millennium Development Goals and has no record of corruption. She questioned CDA Fernandez as to how Umma could change this "distorted image" of her party in the US.

14. (U) CDA Fernandez responded that it is important that Umma party members understand USG perceptions and priorities in Sudan. He emphasized that the top two USG priorities in Sudan are: finding a solution to the violence in Darfur and seeing that the CPA is implemented. CDA Fernandez said, "We respect the Umma Party. We believe it is democratic." He explained that Americans do not have "bad feelings" about the Umma Party, but said that the Umma Party faces a challenge. There is a perception that "maybe your time has passed." You must therefore work hard to prove your relevance to your fellow countrymen and the USG, said Fernandez. He urged the party to unite and speak out on issues that are important to Sudanese citizens. Show your relevance on Darfur and the CPA, said Fernandez. He encouraged them to fill the current "political vacuum" that exists between the NCP and the SPLM. "There has been a new politicization of Darfur" and Darfurians now look to rebel leaders such as SLM's Minni Minnawi or SLM/A's Abdelwahid al-Nur instead of political party leaders, said CDA Fernandez. "Become strong, find a position, and be vocal" on issues that are important, urged Fernandez.

15. (U) Professor Badri retorted, "We believe that if we weren't powerful, we wouldn't exist." She said she believed that the Umma party still had large constituencies in Darfur, despite the fact that many Darfurians now associate themselves with rebel movements instead of political parties. She and the other members agreed that there is indeed a political vacuum to fill and that perhaps Umma can find its way into that space.

UMMA SEEKING HELP WITH POLITICAL DIALOGUE

16. (SBU) Professor Badri said that Umma would like to see an "international conference on Darfur with proper negotiation on a grass-roots level." She asked for USG support on this idea. Badri also announced that Umma would like to start dialogue with "warring factions" from the East, Darfur, and the SPLM and potentially form a coalition with these groups. She asked that the USG help Umma bring these groups together to start a dialogue. She said that Umma, as a moderate Islamic party, would be accepting of all tribal groups in the South. Badri said that the NCP has tried to weaken Umma and seeks to make all opposition political parties powerless. CDA Fernandez agreed and observed that the NCP's actions have succeeded in destroying almost all northern political parties by dividing them from within. Because of the NCP's ability to control State finances, the military, and the intelligence services, it has amassed wealth and power, even though it may have little popular support among Sudanese citizens, he said.

ELECTIONS - A TOOL FOR CHANGE

17. (SBU) Professor Badri emphasized that the upcoming national elections must be held in a free and fair way. She described the elections as "the only tool for change." Badri said the elections

KHARTOUM 00000164 002 OF 002

could help solve many issues, including the problems of Darfur and Abyei. Badri promised that the Umma party would offer good governance and claimed "we have nothing against anybody." At the same time, she warned that even if the NCP loses majority representation in the GNU, it does not mean they will lose control over State finances or the economy.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: Although the Umma Party wants to regain the political power and broad-based support it had in the late 80s, it will have to effectively articulate positions on key issues such as the Abyei dispute, Darfur, and CPA implementation to catch the attention of the populace. It will also need to democratize internally beyond the immediate control of the Al-Mahdi family circle, something it has so far been loath to do. Additionally, it will have to wisely seek out coalition partners ahead of the 2009 elections in order to reasonably compete against the NCP or the SPLM. As supposedly the largest political force in Sudan after the NCP and the SPLM, an alliance by one of the CPA partners with the Umma Party could tip the balance in its favor. Re-building its battered constituency in Darfur would greatly strengthen its hand and the Umma Party would likely be muzzled if it begins to speak out aggressively on Darfur. Repression of Umma Party leader Al-Mahdi would carry many risks for the NCP, however, so we would expect the Umma party to begin to speak out. A quiet Umma party may mean an alliance with the NCP is already in the works.

FERNANDEZ